

Today's second reading comes from the gospel of John, chapter 15, verses 9-17. It is here that we find Jesus gathered with his disciples giving them instruction about life after his death. Listen for God's word to you this day.

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants^[a] any longer, because the servant^[b] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

What does it look like to love one another? Does it look like flowers and chocolate, does it look like love letters, does it look like long committed relationships, does it look like being welcomed into a family that isn't yours at birth, does it look like celebrating one

another's achievements? Yes and...Love looks like all of these things and yet it also looks like so much more.

The sort of love that Jesus is talking about today, the sort of love that is the basis of Jesus' ministry is a deep and intentional love. The love that covers all of us through Jesus' love is not a feeling sort of love, it's not romantic or reliant on good deeds and happy thoughts, it's a love of action and care, of compassion and mercy, it's a type of love that is an embodiment of God that compels us beyond our own judgements and needs, it invites us to move beyond ourselves and allow God to be shown through us, it is a modeling that we learn from Jesus to love those who we ourselves have deemed unworthy of love.

Debi Thomas wisely says: "Even if we put our cultural clichés aside, we know that authentic love can't be manipulated, simulated, or rushed. Those of us who have kids understand full well that commanding them to love each other never works. The most we can do is insist that our children *behave as if* they love: "Share your toys." "Say sorry." "Don't hit." "Use kind words." But these actions — often performed with gritted teeth and rolling eyes — aren't the same as what Jesus is talking about in John's Gospel. He doesn't give his disciples (or us) the easy "out" of doing nice things with clenched, resentful hearts. Nor would I want him to; nothing feels as hollow as a "loving" act performed lovelessly. Moreover, I doubt that the people who flocked to Jesus would have done so if they sensed that his compassion was brittle or forced."

The love that Jesus shows us, the love that Jesus asks us to abide within is a love that is authentic, genuine, and different. It goes beyond the surface to the depths of who we are as children of God, claimed in God's love, a love that is shown to us by Jesus.

To abide, can mean to rest in and it also means to act in accordance with. By saying to us: "abide in my love," Jesus is inviting us to act in accordance with the love that he has shown to us through his actions, through his very life lived out most intimately in the presence of the disciples. The life that sat with the Samaritan woman at the well, the life that shared in the wedding feast, the life that healed those who were sick in body, mind, and soul, the life that lifted up those who had been pushed to the ground and had stones raised against them, the life that spoke out for those who were told they could not access the presence of God themselves. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus says.

Rest in the power of this kind of love, rest in knowing that as you live out these acts Jesus's joy is being complete, and so is yours. This is the path of salvation.

Even though we have been extended this great invitation that invites liberation for us all, invites us to lean into a new and radical love that has the potential to literally change the world, we sometimes allow our humanity to get in the way. When our egos step in we find ourselves wanting to determine someone's worthiness of love, worthiness of investment, worthiness of acceptance. But, that is merely our egos, our desire to control God's love, to control the very real life path of someone, rather than abiding in Jesus. Finding rest by acting in accordance with the one we follow.

I don't know about you all but when I am wrapped up in my view of who is worthy of love or whose actions need my control in order for the person to be deemed worthy, it leads to anxiety that I can feel throughout my body, it leads to restless sleep, and it leads to reaching for more and more control. But, when I can name that, when I can recognize that my determination of another person's value has no place in God's world, the anxiety falls away, the sleep returns, and I am free from the need to control. Not only am I in a more peaceful, liberated place for myself, but I am also able to see that person as they are and for who they are, a child of God, worthy of love. As I abide in Jesus, joy follows.

James Baldwin said, "To be with God is really to be involved with some enormous, overwhelming desire, and joy, and power which you cannot control, which controls you...I conceive of God, in fact, as a means of liberation and not a means to control others."

When we are free of our own demands on others to be worthy of our love, and especially of God's love shown through us, we are able to exist in joy. It is then that our life is not wrapped up in our personal demands on others' way of being in the world and we are instead free to meet them where they are, the same as Jesus did throughout his ministry, as he traveled from place to place, talking to those that even his disciples didn't want him to speak to or sit with or care for. It is from that place of love, that place of abiding in Jesus that we are able to bear fruit that is inviting, welcoming, nourishing, empowering, encouraging, compassionate, merciful, and grace-filled.

Maybe you all have had someone love you like that before. I sure hope so. It's a love that sees you for who you are and welcomes it in, held, and honored. And because it is so cherished it compels you to love in that same way, to show others that same sort of care and compassion, and in those moments there is a spark of joy, there is an understanding that everything that is out there could all be fixed if we all just experienced one another in this way, and for a moment that is enough because it's just enough joy and it's just enough sweet fruit that you will try to achieve it again and again, even out there, in the world.

We humans are complex, and we have the ability to take something as simple as love and make it conditional or complicated. Luckily, we have a God who shows us time and time again the love that we are called to strive toward, and we once again become the recipients of such love. It is not performative, it isn't a forced action, it is real, it is authentic, genuine, and different from what we expect because it is not of us, it is of God. Jesus tells us that we too can bear this same fruit, that because we have seen his work in the world, his love in the world, we too can bear the fruit of God's love. So won't we commit to that? Won't we commit to sharing the love of God we have received? To allowing God to love through us? Won't we lean into Jesus' invitation to abide in his love for ourselves and for the world? Imagine the sweet fruit we could bear.